

Service Date: September 28, 2005

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICE REGULATION  
BEFORE THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION  
OF THE STATE OF MONTANA

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IN THE MATTER OF NORTHWESTERN	)	UTILITY DIVISION
ENERGY, MONTANA-DAKOTA UTILITIES	)	
CO., and ENERGY WEST MONTANA,	)	DOCKET NO. D2005.9.145
Expansion of Winter-Months "Moratorium" on	)	
Termination for Qualifying Customers	)	ORDER NO. 6696

**INTERIM ORDER**

The Public Service Commission (PSC) orders for 2005 that the November 1 start date for PSC rule ARM 38.5.1410 (termination of service during winter months) is moved forward to October 15. This order applies in this year (2005) only. This order applies only to natural gas and electric service to residential customers by NorthWestern Energy, Montana-Dakota Utilities Co., and Energy West Montana.

In the interests of public health, safety, and welfare, the PSC prohibits termination of energy utility service to qualifying residential customers during the period November 1 through April 1 of each year. *ARM 38.5.1410*. A qualifying residential customer is one who receives public assistance, has an income at or below the federal poverty guidelines, or is, or has a household member that is, at least 62 years old or handicapped. *ARM 38.5.1401(7), definition of "person unable to pay or to pay only in installments," and ARM 38.5.1410*.

In recent months residential customer bills for energy service have reflected notably higher prices than at this same period in recent previous years. Indications are that residential energy bills will continue to reflect these high prices or even higher prices. The PSC determines that it is

likely that there will be an increase in the number of qualifying residential customers who, under other circumstances might have been able to pay for utility services in a timely manner, under the present circumstances will be subject to termination prior November 1. Because of the costs of termination and increased customer burden in remedying bill deficiencies and obtaining restored service the PSC determines the qualifying customers need expanded protection from termination of service at this time.

This order is an interim (temporary) order. It is effective immediately and remains effective until further action by the PSC. The PSC is issuing, simultaneous with this order, a notice of hearing on this PSC action. If no opposition to this order is received before or at hearing, then this order becomes final without further action of the PSC. If opposition to this order is received before or at hearing, then the PSC will consider the arguments and issue an appropriate final order.

Done and dated this 23 day of September, 2005, by a vote of 5-0.

BY ORDER OF THE MONTANA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

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GREG JERGESON, Chairman

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BRAD MOLNAR, Vice-Chairman

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DOUG MOOD, Commissioner

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ROBERT H. RANEY, Commissioner

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THOMAS J. SCHNEIDER, Commissioner

ATTEST:

Connie Jones  
Commission Secretary

(SEAL)

NOTE: Any interested party may request the Commission to reconsider this decision. A motion to reconsider must be filed within ten (10) days. See 38.2.4806, ARM.